

VZCZCXRO2156
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1260 1020502
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 120502Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0694
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001260

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS COMMISSION SELECTION OFF TO A GOOD START

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchris
t for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) United Nations Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Senior Electoral Advisor Sandra Mitchell told poloff in a April 10 meeting that the selection process for the new Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is "off to a surprisingly good start." The Council of Representatives (COR) is implementing the UNAMI recommended fair and transparent process to select commissioners, she said. According to legislation signed into law in February, the IHEC will have the responsibility for administering and overseeing all elections and referenda at the national, regional, and provincial level. It replaces the outgoing Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI).

¶2. (SBU) Demonstrating support for UN involvement, COR Deputy Speaker Khalid Attiya (Shia) provided a letter to UNAMI inviting them to observe and advise the commissioner selection process. Attiya will allow UNAMI to verify implementation of the recommended selection process, conduct random quality checks on the first stage screening, and sit in on all second stage interviews, said Mitchell. Furthermore, Attiya told Mitchell that he intends to provide an additional letter engaging UNAMI to advise the new IHEC with any up-coming elections and referenda.

¶3. (SBU) Mitchell stated that the COR selection committee's public outreach for nominations was excellent, and included over 400 media outlets. "Hundreds and hundreds" of nominations have pored in - from all 18 provinces, from men and women, from all sects and ethnicities, and even from the Diaspora in Jordan and Syria, she said. In addition, a majority of the out-going elections commissioners are seeking re-nomination, she observed.

Comment

¶4. (C) The selection process appears on track to meet the COR's announced April 26 deadline. However, the increase in regional nominations suggests that transport to Baghdad for interviews may be a constraint that requires extending the deadline to properly process all meritorious applications. After months of delay in passing the IHEC law, Post is cautiously encouraged by the sudden focus by the COR on this process. We also still expect the political party leadership to weigh in behind the scenes in selecting the IHEC. Once the new Commission is established, UNAMI will begin training and developing the capacity of the IHEC. One challenge is to ensure the roughly 300 mid and lower level personnel in the IECI remain in their positions to ensure a smooth transition and retain institutional knowledge. Another challenge will be the appointment of provincial General Electoral Officers, who are to be nominated by the COR and appointed by the IHEC.
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